1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

D. Traditional Methods of Investigation of Crimes.

694 [784] Two factors are noteworthy in the traditional method of investigating crimes. One is the use of the supernatural in tracing the criminal's trail; the other is participation of the Coptic church, once the suspect is caught. While recent, modern instructions from the central government try to suppress the former, neither factor has lost much of its power over the attitudes and beliefs of nearly all rural Amhara, even townspeople.

625 691 a) The thiefcatcher, "lēbashay", recently outlawed officially, was a hereditary office, passed from father to son, thus entrusted only to Amhara (or other Abyssinian Branches). This inheritance, however, much like inheritance of feudal fief ("gult"), had to be re-acknowledged in every generation. The heir, grown to maturity, would take his father's medicine bag, "korojo", travel to the head "lebashay" at the capital (of the province or country), and request renewal of license. This license could be withdrawn at any time, on complaints from the local headman, the cheqa shum, that the thiefcatcher had become corrupt, e.g. that he was in league with thieves and was so unsuccessful that he must be using fake medicine.

789 694 The magic involved in the procedure was "sympathetic magic", for the effort made was one of acting out all of the movements of the thief, from re-enactment of the crime itself, on the spot where it was committed, tracing his trail of flight, eating where he ate, and even resting in a state of sleep to indicate when and

789 694 where the thief had slept, until he was caught.

The thiefcatcher directed this procedure, but did not drug himself. For that puppose he selected a boy about the age of a deacon, i.e. 10 to 15, for it was believed that puberty spoiled the sensitivity and "unblemished innocence" of the boy. This boy was never taught the secret of his power. Often he was a young slave (more recently ex-slave), who had been selected on account of his particular suggestibility. It was believed that years of this repeated drugging made him a permanent addict, slowed his mental functions and even sent him occasionally into raving fits; so that a person who had served as "tracer" for the lebashay could not be a witness in court. [278]

When complaint of a theft reached the lēbashay from within his "territory", he went to the ċheqa shum or other local administrative official, and asked permission to begin his investigation. Togather, they as well as the local "aṭbiya danya" judge and witnesses (if it was grand larceny) went to the place where the crime had been committed. The boy, young enough never to have had manly sexual intercourse with a woman, was now given the drug to drink. The lēbashay tied the boy's waist with a girdle, leaving 3 to 4 yards hanging down, (to be used later to maintain control like a chain in curbing a dog).

The boy was now given a hornful of milk to drink, in which a black powder from the medicine bag had been dissolved. It did not take long before the boy began

789 694 to make jerky motions, increasing in speed, acting "hot on the trail", whereupon the lebashay seized the loose end of the girdle. The boy pulled in one direction, and the group followed. When he entered a house, he re-enacted the activities of the thief in complete detail, including sleeping in his bed, until the lebashay prodded him to "awake" and continue the trail, saying 3 times "aderas" (get going, arrive). The boy jumped up, roughly pushed anyone in his way regardless of the normal respectful etiquette of behavior toward a "great man", and continued the chase. When he entered a hamlet or compound, everyone had to "sit", no one could leave. The boy would approach every individual, make magic contact with him by pushing him with the knee (regarded as the seat of manly power). If he seemed distracted, the lebashay might slap the boy, much as one would an unruly dog. In crossing brooks, the boy was carried across, since water was believed to draw away the power from the medicine, making him lose his "scent". If water did inadvertently splash on him, another boy had to be drugged to continue the trail. Lemons were also believed to affect the power of the medicine.

685 696 When the thief was found, and confessed, he had to pay the fee of the lebashay, fixed during Emperor Menelik II restraining laws to a maximum of Eth$6.-; the thief also was to post two personal guarantors to guarantee that he would return the stolen item and appear in court. The lebashay could decide to accept these conditions and release him, or turn him over to

685 the "danya". Interestingly enough, if the thief did
696 not have money on hand to pay the fee of the lēbashay, it was the responsibility of the victim who had originally requested his services to pay him on the spot, and try to collect later from the thief. This had the effect of eliminating complaints of petty theft from setting this costly process in motion.

694 It seems that amateur thieves were often caught
789 by this process, and usually confessed, feeling helpless when confronted with such "powerful" means of detection. Professional thieves, particularly in the towns, who were known to have evaded detection, were and are believed to have obtained a powerful magic antidote from a dabtara scribe.

694 When all methods of detection have failed, the
787 distraught victim has a last resort. He may go to the nearest "tänkwa", a practitioner of black magic, and ask him to divine by throwing his bones. This , too, is now prohibited, but still goes on, though not as openly as before. Failing even in this, the victim may go to the Coptic church and there, having purchased incense
754 and given a gift, pronounce a solemn curse, "säbätē masdäfat", on the thief.

171 The pattern of the lēbashay has been traced by
694 some observers to ancient Greek parallels, by others to the Arab bedouin "djirra" or "kassas" thief-seeker who also tracks murderers in tribal feuds. The tankwas seem of more typically African witchcraft pattern.

Often
793 most of his income is derived from writing "ketāb", amu-
[789] lets on goatskin parchment, worn by ailing persons on their neck-cord, or by women, in leather containers fastened to belt straps around the waist. The priest do forbid this amulet-writing activity, which is sometimes (not without reason) suspect not only of "white" magic, but also black magic. Yet the priests ignore and overlook this, as they have done for centuries, perhaps because in this way they obtain the "dabtara's" other services free of cost.

The dābtära is often feared by the common people because of his power, both medical and supernatural. In recent years, with the suppression of the "tänkway" witch-doctor, the clientele of the debtara has actually increased, for now there is no one but the dabtara to exorcise "buda" (magic hyena, werewolf) possession, to protect from the evil eye, or to curse and capture thieves. Moreover, it is respectable to go to the dābtära, who operates in the shadow of the church, who associates with holy priests and even drinks beer with them at feasts. No gossip can attach to a man seen entering the hut of the dabtara, for his errand may be decent and even sacred.

[661] Most dābtära reap full benefits from the awe in which they are held. They even transgress etiquette when it suits their purposes. If uninvited at a wedding or other festivity, they often "crash" the party, and expect to be and are given seats of honor and the choicest food and mead.

293 story. Later ones imitate European crowns.

778 In parades tall crosses of bright metal are carried, Like most Abyssinian priestly hand crosses, they are so ornamented with further cross designs that they appear to the Abyssinian as "perforated"; hence the common expression "perforated as the cross" (where a Westerner would use the symbol of the sieve). Priests and monks always carry a handcross, which they hold out to a passing acquaintance to kiss, theppproper greeting toward clergy, even on ordinary days. Smaller crosses are [789] used by the public as amulets against evil spirits. The larger crosses, with their ornamental supports, forming perforated circles and squares, sometimes contain engra- [325] ved verses. The method of casting is the"cire perdue", which is also used to cast the concave tops of the "ma- [534] qomya" crutch. In front of old churches, resonant stones are suspended from poles, and when struck, act as bells to summon for the service.

778 Other metal church utensils include the censers in which incense is burned during the services, swung by the officiating priest. They may be of brass, silver, iron, even clay in poorer churches. They are often equipped with numerous small bells. Very common is [534] the sistrum, called "sänassel" (onomatopoetic), a rattle instrument reminscent of ancient Egypt, usually of brass, 8 inches long, with a straight wooden handle, the metal frame cast in "cire perdue", often by Falasha smiths. [177] The frame is perforated like a cross. The tinkling disks, which glide along the cross-wire between the sides of the frame

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

796 smoky, incense-filled church, to reach home and begin the feasting on meat. Sheep are rapidly slaughtered all over the area, fires are lit, pepper stew is boiling everywhere, and the vast jars of barley beer, injära, coffee, and milk and butter are consumed. This feasting, often ruinous to the digestion, continues for some time, for the Wednesday and Friday fasts are abrogated for the next 50 days.

With regained strength, fired by good food and [526] beer, the young men begin games of javelin throwing. Ball games ("qenchebt") continue the entire following week, when the heavy feasting still keeps work to a minimum.

The last outdoor picnic before the rains takes place occurs on the 1st day of the month of "Genbot", when the "Ledäta" (birthday) of the Virgin Mary is celebrated. The leafy outdoor shelter, "dass", is erected for this occasion. Both women and men take part, though [789] in separate groups. At the end of the day, some women "clean house" of evil spirits, to keep them away while shut in during the rainy season. This is done by casting boiled "nefro" porridge into the bush, telling the personified sickness to go after it.

[2C] During the next church holydays, fish, particularly the "senro", become staples of the menu of priests and others, since rivers begin to fill with water and fish are more plentiful. There is a church festival "räbbä kahnat" (lit. inventory of the priests), a purely internal affair,

844 During parturition, the midwife usually sits on the ground in such a position that the baby will drop into her lap. The mother usually kneels. Sometimes incense is lit to lure the baby out, and to attract protective "zar" spirits. It is believed that both embryo and placenta consist of menstrual blood that has not come out and become coagulated like buttermilk; fermented with the male semen, like yeast. The placenta, "adär" (discharged dirty part), also called "yäenqedē lej" (lit. host of the child), is buried out of sight. The baby is immediately fed butter, anointed with butter, and wrapped loosely in a warm toga. Meanwhile the mother is tightly bound in the long cotton
[789] girdle, "lest her back hurt". In some areas, iron tools or weapons are placed close to her, to frighten off demons which fear iron.

[842] If the baby is a boy, women emerge from the huts shouting "ellel". The father, usually waiting nearby, is summoned. There is merriment and drinking and "fukkara" dancing among men in the evening.

304 852 Circumcision ("gezrat") of boys takes place a week after birth, and is of less religious significance than the baptism which follows some weeks later. It is a simple operation of removal of the foreskin, usually carried out by a "wogäsha" (native herbologist-surgeon) or other skilled man. Uncircumcised persons, e.g. Shanqalla from the lowlands, are insulted as "arotam" (sheathed); even the Italians were referred to as "wänäla", a reference to having foreskins; less insulting is the factual ter "qurzam" (uncircumcised).

755 certain Christian words which the buda fears. Some also slaughter a sheep or fowl, eat it roasted, then burn the bones so as not to attract the buda again.

Sometimes a reluctant buda is transferred bodily to a spot on a trail outside the hamlet. There a root of a bush is twisted - the signature of the buda and expression of his greedy intent. Whoever passes unprotected is pounced on by the hungry buda.

755 789 Written amulets (ketab") are hung on the neckcord or around the waist to assure successful prognosis. The writing and sale of these amulets is one of the most common extracurricular activities of the dabtara scribe and often his most lucrative income-producing work. Hence the dabtara is feared, for he can use his power for good or ill. The amulets contain such formulae as "besem Aw, Wold, M'ënfës Qeddus" (In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Ghost); mystic names of archangels; formulae in Amharic, Geez, even Arabic of sorts. Church scholars with the title "mämhër" (professor) are believed to be able to write even more powerful amulets, for it is believed that God gave 1000 special "medicines" to Jesus on Christmas (a sort of birthday gift) and that Jesus and the angels taught these "medicines" to the mämhër. Another advantage of their amulets is that the mamher are never suspected of using their power for ill. In either case, the name of the person to be protected is written in the amulet; so that it cannot be transferred or sold without erasure and the new name.

159 754 As noted, women in the age group 15 to 30 are the most often struck. The following case was observed by the author in the town of Gondar. The patient was a 27 year old married woman, Zawditu Bogale (her first name meant "Queenie"). She was the mother of

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

manslaughter of an average citizen, killed e.g. in an automobile accident, or by a trigger-happy policeman, at "semanya" on its present monetary level.

Other types of ganyen disease are forms of epilepsy, "haut mal", referred to by the Amhara as "ganyen yazä" (lit. the ganyen has seized him; plural is "aganent". In this case, a dabtara is often called in and tries to exorcise the evil spirit with magic formulae; sometimes the woggesha doctor tries to intoxicate the patient with a paste of "assärkush täbbätäbkush" (Cissus adenautha), which drug finally lets him have some rest. In contrast, the method of the täñqway is literally a bag of tricks.

In his role as magician, the täñqway is called "qumMa" (from "qomä", he stood up), for he tries to identify the personality of the evil spirit from his abode; e.g. in the water of a brook, or a waterhole in the river, or under a certain tree, etc. The magician is also considered an expert on fire and lightning. When a person is struck by lightning, "mäbräq" (lit. Thunder), the priests consider it heavenly punishment and in the past even refused to bury the victim in the churchyard; thus the täñqway is called in. His treatment consists of moving the victim quickly to the fireplace - for he regards fire and warm ashes as the counteracting principle. If a house is on fire in town, it is still believed that the magician, standing on the roof of a neighboring house with a mirror, can prevent the spreading of the fire by causing the flames to recoil.

Cases of drowning are his specialty also. This too is considered by the church a heavenly punishment for hidden crimes, for the victim is regarded as having been surrendered to the "demons";

and the worst and most numerous ganyen are regarded as water spirits, e.g. at the Blue Nile and everywhere also during the long rainy season.

After diagnosing the identity and origin of the specific ganyen, the tänqway tries to exorcise the demon by treating him with contempt (exactly opposite to treatment given the "zar"). Instead of feeding the spirit a succulent "mäqwädäshä" (= love gift), the ganyen - possessed person is fed a lunch of ashes. For a ganyen that is a fire-spirit, is attracted by ashes, his element, and may thus be induced to leave the body of the patient in order to feast. The tänqway follows this method even in cases of buda as indicated before.

The next step in treatment consists of "fixing" the ganyen somewhere else, so that he will not return into the body of the victim. This is done by the scapegoat technique; e.g. by fixing the demon into the body of a chicken, killing it, throwing the carcass away where the hyenas will eat it; or transferring the water-spirit to another locality.

Besides his role as a healer of ganyen, the major activity of the tänqway is as diviner of lost or stolen goods. It is not polite to use the term "tänqway" in his presence, instead he is politely addressed as "awaqi" (lit. knower, wise man). Since he usually makes it his business to know what goes on among professional thieves, his insight into such matters is sometimes indeed considerable; but also contributes to his bad social reputation. In "diagnosing" the case, the tanqway acts as detective, studies the place of the crime, investigates neighbors and finally draws seashells (zagol Lebsu") and bones from his bag and throws them, to read additional information from their driection and mutual position.

795 Some dabtära have grown wealthy through mass-production of
756 amulets, in which they leave the name of the client free, to be
556 filled in on the market when sold. But this "waters down" his reputation.

b. The cosmology of demons treated by amulets

● 789 The amulets written by the dabtara are worn, usually on the "matab" neckcord, or around the waist especially of women. They are not read. To be effective they must bear the inscribed name of the wearer, though it is possible to have a dabtara erase the name and substitute another. Usually the amulet is written on varying qualities of parchment (from very thick to very fine), rolled tightly into a small leather case. The ink used is usually [384] made of soot, charcoal, iron powder and gallus. To emphasize an important name or matter, imported red ink is used.

Amulets also may contain drawn pictures, symbols and geometric design, some of a type that has been called "cabalistic". A fre- [776] quent picture is the scene depicting the killing of the female demon of miscarriage, "Werzelya", by Saint Susneos, seated on a horse using a lance (much like European scenes of St. George killing the dragon). This demon is sometimes depicted as a female [561] of the negroid (Barya) tribe, from which the Amhara used to capture slaves. The legend that accompanies this scene is as follows:

773 A Christian martyr, named Susneyos, had married and his child
789 had been killed by the female demon Werzelya. Thereupon he prayed to Jesus and received special power to slay themurderess. St. Susneyos mounted his horse, took his spear and rode away to the desert (evidently the Nilotic lowland below the northwestern escarpment), where the demon was hiding with others of her kind.

773 On the way he found an old witch. Interrogating her, St. Susneyos
789 learned that Werzelya had gone into a garden. Finally, he found the demon sitting under a tree. He speared and mortally wounded her. Before expiring she promised never to afflict anyone who carried the inscribed name of Saint Susneyos.

The effectiveness of the amulet lies therefore in reminding the female demon of her promise to Susneyos.

789 Other common designs include angels with fiery swords (sometimes seen also incised upon wooden church doors); the cross over sun and moon; and the evil eye, sometimes oval, sometimes in profile, but often round with a red iris (symbolizing the magic drinking of blood).

A typical formula against the demon of epilepsy, "barya", reads as follows:

> "You (actually "he", polite), Barya, who steals the heart of man (i.e. renders insane),
> who darkens the eye,
> who comes as shadow by nighttime,
> I put a spell on you, and curse you by ...(name of saint or angel)."

776 There are three common categories in the cosmology of demon
753 diseases treated by amulets:
755

(1) General evil-eye disease, referred to generically as "buda" - particularly in cases of puzzling functional and mental ailments - or identified and diagnosed by the name of a demon - particularly in fevers and paralysis.

(2) The demons of epilepsy, "Barya".

(3) Gynecological ailments, ascribed to specific female demons.

Amulets are collectively referred to as "ketab" (lit. writings, in Geez).

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Table 13: The Scribe as Healer: Demons, their Individual Specialties, Exorcism.

category	name of demon	demonic character	demonic disease specialty	demon's affiliation or symbol	syncretism (other demons)	dabtara amulet and counteracting principle
(1)	"Buda"	evil eye	fevers (mech mättaw); functional ailments; hysteria, catalepsy	eye with bloody-red iris; ironsmith ethnics		powerful amulet; Christian re-baptising of patient: exorcism
(1)	"Lägana"	threshhold demon in early mourning	spitting blood (tuberculosis) through "red snake in belly". Amebic dysentery.		Buda	amulet of St. Sebastian as prophylactic smoke of "wogärt" plant which snake hates, in hut. Carry dead through hole in wall (in Gojjam), so demon cannot find way back to infect others in family. Spraying with holy water.
(1)	"Däŋgara Mätal"	household demon	infectious disease, highly contageous within hut. (Endangers travellers.)			amulet as prophylactic. Lure demon out of the hut through trail of chicken feathers, lemons and perfume, onto trail, where it is transferred to travellers.
(1)	"Nädara", "Aynät"	evil eye, female demon	eye diseases, esp. ophthalmia	red eyes	Buda	amulet recalling Jesus breaking the spell of this demon

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category	name of demon	demonic character	demonic disease speciality	demon's affiliation or symbol	syncretism (other demons)	dabtara amulet and counteracting principle
(1)	"Ayna Tila" (lit. Shadow Eye)	evil eye, female demon	blocks projects; blocks learning of students; causes sleepwalking; likes to attack men. Confuses protective zar spirits so they cannot help.		Zar	amulet "tembertä hebust". intoxicant plant "esä fars" (see Zar).
(1)	"Eqabe Seray"	evil eye, male demon	Various mischief; can turn himself into human figure	Non-Copt neighbors; Barya, iron-smith ethnics	Buda	Christian amulet.
(1)	"Dabbas"	Household demon	undefined illness and death; "aroused when thirsty"			Christian amulet.
(2)	"Barya"	dancing demons; their chief "Legewon" has red eyes and is "buda"	epilepsy, haut mal ("yesama barya"), esp. in male victims.	Barya tribe of Nilotic lowlands. Symbol: tornado	Zar, Buda	Amulet with angel of fiery sword (Christian).
(2)	"Tegrida"	restless demon	epilepsy, petit mal; causes "falling-down sickness"			Christian amulet.

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category	name of demon	demonic character	demonic disease specialty	affiliation of demon's; or symbol	syncretism (other demons)	dabtara amulet and counteracting principle
(3)	"Werselya"	female demon	attacks women: barrenness through stopped menstruation which "prevents conception", 'yIdam tefat); bleeding from uterus (menorrhagia); miscarriage.	Barya tribe negress		amulet with legend of her promise to Saint Susneyos. It is suspended from the Christian neckcord "mitib".
(3)	"Karina"	female demon	attacks women who have just given birth (puerperal fever).			amulet recalling her defeat at the hands of King Solomon.
(3)	"Shotalay"	female demon, subordinate.	causes stillbirth		Zar	exorcism
(3)	"Tegertaya", "Teggerta", "Waddegeni"	female demon	attacks women after childbirth through puerperal fever or catalepsy (postnatal depression).		Zar, Buda	prophylactic amulet; quiet cooperation with Zar doctor who tries cajoling the spirit through the patient (See zar).

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

177 The "seal of Solomon" (actually the 6-pointed star of David) often
755 appears on Amhara amulets (e.g. against Karina). Even Hebrew-
789 appearing characters are found on amulets (a widespread custom in the Middle East.) [125] As might be expected, Hebrew traits are even more emphasized among the Falashas, who begin every amulet with: "Blessed be the God of Israel, God of all Creatures; prayer against.....".

Arabic influence has served primarily as a carrier. Directly derived from the Arabs are the 12 signs of the Zodiac, found on Abyssinian amulets. Carried was the "seal of Alexander".

Christian mythology and hagiology predominates in the cosmology of the amulets of the dabtara. Many of them begin with the formula: "In the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, one Divinity; prayer against.....". Deniers of Christ who are suspected as sorcerers, are often personified in these amulets as Falasha or Barya. Christian martyrs and saints, Abyssinian or "from Jerusalem", are appealed to for intercession against demons. The following are frequently encountered in amulets:

776 Abuna (bishop) Batra Maryam, Abyssinian saint, against snakebite (pro-
177 phylactic); St. George, "Qeddus Giyorgis", shown spearing a monster
755 (an old idea possibly dating to the Bel-Marduk battle among ancient Babylonians, and Ra and Horus in ancient Egypt).

St. Sebastian is often depicted in drawings, and appealed to against the Kagana and other threshhold demons. To keep out disease and
[751] evil, this amulet is often placed above the entrance to a hut; but not in the doorway itself, if someone inside is already sick, for this would block the exit of the demon.

125. Reich, Sigismund: Quatre Coups Magiques. Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales, Vol. 7-8, pp. 159-175. Institut Francais de Damas, 1937-8.

3: Buxton Y-5 (1946-1948)1949 MP5 Amhara MP5

shortly before the Italian invasion of 1935, the first was accomplished peacefully; but not the second. According to the story told me, the *tabot* of the lower Ghiorghis had been borrowed and carried in solemn procession on the plateau in order to ward off a swarm of locusts which were damaging the crops there. This measure was successful, and the plateau people determined to keep the *tabot* which had proved itself so powerful. The people of the gorge would not agree, and tried to recapture their *tabot*. The plateau party however successfully defended it by force of arms, and later built a little church to house it. It was not unusual to attribute specific powers to *tabots*: for instance, that of Dimbaro Mariam (a little east of the north-east corner of the sheet) used to be carried to war by the emperors, attended by a retinue of priests and scribes, to bring success in battle.

The last church to be founded in these parts was the new St. Gabriel, on a prominent hill-top in the district of Dilila near the south-east corner of the sheet. I came upon it when first following the upper course of the Beressa in December 1946. As I approached the foot of the hill I learnt from passers-by that a new church had been built upon it, and that the foundress herself, a certain great lady from Addis Ababa, was at that moment on the hill. Climbing a rocky track to the top, I saw a cluster of new huts and the still unfinished building of the church. Nearby was a large canvas awning stretched rather clumsily between rough stone walls. Under the awning I found the lady herself, short and stout and genial, sitting on a camp chair; around her, squatting on the ground, was a deferential assembly of local dignitaries, personal retainers and priests. After the fluster caused by my unexpected arrival had died down, I had a talk with the worthy lady who, having just presided at a mid-day meal, now plied me with very welcome refreshment. She had been born and bred in this very place. Having spent most of her life elsewhere, and somehow acquired a certain amount of wealth, she had returned in later life to her place of birth and founded this church only the year before my visit. It met a need, she said, for the area lacked a church, and no other St. Gabriel existed anywhere in the neighbourhood. As it chanced, I had come on the day after St. Gabriel's annual festival (which is the 19th of Tahisas, or, in European style, the 28th of December). She expressed great regret that I had not been present at the festival itself, when big crowds had come from Debra Berhan and from all the surrounding country.

This incident seemed to me interesting as demonstrating the tenacity of the local religious tradition in Ethiopia. After all the upheaval and disruption of Italian occupation and the Second World War, the hold of the ancient Church over the Amhara people seemed unweakened. The Church was able to extend its influence in an area not yet well served as readily as ever. It was still an appropriate act for a pious person to found a new church in a lonely place. Perhaps these things are not surprising, for the Church has been the main support and inspiration of Ethiopian unity since the earliest Christian times. It has always been the focal centre of the national sentiment, the fount of renewed resistance to aggression, the main force, in fact, which has maintained Ethiopia's independence and made of it, as Menelik himself once said, an island of Christianity in the great Islamic sea.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

*565 many kinds: they may be male or female, Christian or Muslim, educated or
996 unschooled, mischievous or somber. *Zār* are depicted as resembling the handsome, light-complexioned Abyssinians. They are not necessarily evil: sometimes a person is inspired by the sound of *zār* singing far off in the woods to add a new song to the local lore. But they are the great carriers of physical and
*565 mental illness. Many of the contagious diseases in Abyssinia, like typhus and
996 smallpox, are referred to as "*zār* sicknesses." Above all, the *zār* is the bringer
753 of seizures. When a *zār* lands on somebody's back the victim may go into a
[828] trance, succumb to melancholia, or break out in hysteria. Women are most often subjected to fits caused by *zār*—usually by male *zār*, who perform some kind of magical coitus with them and try to compete with their husbands.
[845] When a freak is born to a woman, it is often attributed to the malicious effect of a *zār* jealous of her husband.

*565 Though some kinds of *zār* only desist from molesting their victims through
996 constant propitiations, others can be won over to serve as powerful protecting
[562] spirits. Thus an initial discomfort can be turned into a permanent advantage, offering the erstwhile victim magical protection and, as one student has suggested, affording women a temporary escape from their depressed social status through the companionship and opportunities for self-expression found in associations of *zār* "patients."[6]

*565 Human beings with supernatural powers are of two kinds: those who
754 manipulate the spirits and practice magic, and those who are themselves pos-
787 sessed. The possessed are called *ṭayb* or *budā*. *Ṭayb* (or *ṭabib*) in its original sense means "manual worker," but it has acquired the connotation of "one with the evil eye," the primary meaning of *budā*. By looking at someone the *budā* or *ṭayb* "drinks his blood" through the magic power of his evil eye. The victim will first feel a severe headache and fatigue, then show hysterical frenzy, and finally intestinal cramps. His fingers will be clenched around his thumbs, a sign that the *budā* has grasped the thumbs and does not want anyone to see him taking his "food" from the victim. If the victim is not cured he will eventually waste away and die.

*565 The *budā* is helpless to check his malevolent power, and if he enters the
754 home of a friend who is not a *budā* he will shout ahead to get the children out
[262] of the way for fear he might unwittingly infect them. People who eat pork
[189] are thought invulnerable against the evil eye, the pork in their systems serving as a kind of antibody against the infection. Potters and metalsmiths have been
[323] kept in a low caste position in Abyssinia partly because of the belief that such
[326] artisans inherit this evil power along with their craft from their parents. It is
[554] important in selecting a spouse for one's child to make sure that there is no *budā* blood in the family, and to be called a *budā* or *ṭayb* is one of the more serious insults.

The Amhara peasant has many beliefs about the malevolent beings in his

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world. Some are purely descriptive, like the notion that *budā* turn into hyenas after dark or ride hyenas like horses, or the belief that when red spots appear on the side of a clay pot when it is heated over a fire it means that the *ṭayb* who made the pot are fighting each other. Others guide him in warding off the evil ones, such as the idea that evil spirits can be kept away when a female child has been born by placing something of iron at the head of the mother's bed. But for serious trouble—when someone has been afflicted by a *zār* or infected by a *budā*—the folk wisdom does not suffice, and a specialist is sought.

The *ṭanquāy*, or "sorcerer," is consulted for exorcising demons as well as for physical ailments. In treating a *zār* patient his task is to discern, by clever interrogation, what manner of *zār* is riding the patient and then to determine what sort of gift is required to propitiate this *zār*. For a patient who has been "eaten" by the evil eye, he may succeed in summoning the guilty *budā*—identified when the patient calls out his name during a trance—and inducing him to spit on his victim; or he may resort to such techniques as transferring the demon from the victim to the body of a chicken and then killing the chicken. The *ṭanquāy* has other supernatural powers. He can summon the devil to liquidate the enemy of a client. He can interpret dreams and predict the future. For this he boils coffee, burns incense, and, sitting on a white sheepskin with freshly cut grass spread about the room, speaks out whatever comes to him.

The *dabtarā*, thanks to his knowledge of books and the lore acquired sub rosa while attending the church schools, wields many more powers than does the *ṭanquāy*. He can write amulets to keep away sickness and evil spirits. He knows formulas that can protect one from bullets and instill insatiable passion in the breast of one's beloved. He has the power to bring rain or make it stop, and to plague the householder by turning all of his possessions against him. Like the *ṭanquāy*, his expert knowledge of plants and herbs can heal the sick or poison the client's enemy. His superiority over the *ṭanquāy* is shown by the different manner in which he arranges a divination: he consults his heavy books, brews and interprets leaves, and then writes out his predictions on paper. For all this the *dabtarā*'s fees are usually higher, but his status is perhaps more precarious, for he is after all a man of the church. The peasant feels none too easy in dealing with one who both serves the church and deals with devils.

Time and Space[7]

Devils, *zār*, evil eye, and sorcery are hidden in the crevices of Amhara mentality. They are spoken of, if at all, somewhat fearfully, and some Amhara pretend that such things no longer exist or are of little account in their culture. The sacred spirits, on the other hand, loom large in the public mind.

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garded as more important than human effort in attaining one's goals. "If a man works hard, he may remain poor. If he does not work hard, he may become wealthy. The outcome is due to fate." The peasant is discouraged from determined efforts to make changes in his environment because of the feeling that no matter what he does, God's disposition is what really counts.

In addition to feeling that innovation is ineffectual, the Amhara peasant tends to feel that it is immoral. Reverence for fathers and forefathers is, we observed, a key element of the Amhara ethos. This patriarchal sentiment informs the Amhara's defense not only of his land and his religion, but of the procedures of daily living as well. It is not good to deviate from the familiar ways of doing things because they, too, have been handed down by "our fathers"; this is a phrase which interlards Amharic conversation.

A number of other, more specific, norms have had the effect of discouraging inventiveness among the Amhara. Experimentation with matter was inhibited by the disdain for puttering about with one's hands—doing anything, that is, similar to the activities of the socially dejected artisans and slaves. Hence the peasant retains the same rudimentary tools for wresting a subsistence from nature that he has used for millennia, and searches about the woods for a properly shaped piece of wood rather than improve his art of carpentry.[16] Experimentation with ideas was inhibited by the anti-intellectual cast of Amhara culture, which discredits the pursuit of ideas for their own sake. Ideas pertain either to the unchangeable mysteries, as expressed in the religious literature, or to the unchanging verities of human experience, as expressed in folk proverbs. Ideas are not entertained as "adventure," to use Whitehead's term—as a source of novel possibilities in life, a guide rather than a justification of custom.

Two factors are especially significant in accounting for the Amhara peasant's reluctance to use ideas drawn from experience and insight for the purpose of reshaping custom. One is the fact that the primary medium for the elaboration and dissemination of such ideas—the written word—was affected by a number of restrictions in Amhara culture.[17]* As a consequence, although writing has been known in Abyssinia for two millennia, it had almost never

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* The act of writing was considered to be inherently shameful: like any manual activity other than farming and fighting, writing was regarded as degrading work, the business of scribes whose status was thereby not much higher than that of potters and metalsmiths. Only a small percentage of the clergy learned to write, and those who did were rarely adept at it. The products of writing, moreover, were deemed either too sacred or too nefarious to warrant giving laymen easy access to their medium. Script belonged above all else to the realm of scripture. The awe felt for holy writs was a deterrent against using that medium for other than devotional purposes. The chief private use of writing was for the magic formulas of the *dabtarā*, another connection with the supernatural that discouraged its lay practice. The *dabtarā*'s art served injurious as well as beneficent purposes, and the fear that those who learned to write might stumble onto potent phrases was reason for restricting that skill to a small group of the initiated.

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The *dabtarā*'s way of life is more variable than that of the monk, his possibilities for income more diverse than those of the priest. He may be attached to a church as a chorister and receive a share of the church's revenues, as do the priests. Or he may donate his services to the church and earn his living by secular employment. He may work as a scribe at the court of a king or nobleman. He may spend most of his time teaching, gaining support from some large church or monastery. Like many priests he may cultivate land. In any case, he is likely to derive some income from the sale of amulets and from medical therapies. Some *dabtarā* are even said to have wandered about the country as hunters, performing magical services for clients as they go.

Dabtarā are not set off from the populace by special insignia. Some wind a turban around their heads, as do many priests; but others may dress like ordinary peasants. If holding more prestigious posts they may be seen with fly-whisks or wearing a *barnos*. But they are known by the people, who fear and respect them. They are feared because of their magical powers, which are believed capable of rendering bullets harmless and turning *ǐnjarā* to dust. They are respected because of their learning, for they are the only educated status group in traditional Amhara society. If the commoner's relatively impulsive *manner* of speaking is contrasted with the quiet reserve of the nobility, his relatively simple *language* is contrasted with that of the *dabtarā*, who is noted for a studied and circumspect use of language (*qāla-dabtarā*) and for larding his Amharic with literary (i.e., Ge'ez) expressions (*ya-dabtarā amäriññā*).

In the case of the religious elite, then, status is in all cases achieved. While there is a natural tendency for sons of priests and *dabtarā* to follow their fathers' example, they arrive at the status in question only by fulfilling the same norms that are applied to the sons of laymen. These norms, however, differ among the different groups within the clergy. Investiture by an authority emanating from the seat of religious charisma, the Alexandrine Patriarchate, and the related ritual requirement of marriage with Communion, were the basis of priestly status, almost irrespective of the personal attainments of the candidate. Personal attainments were *all* that mattered, on the other hand, in the case of monk and *dabtarā*, but they differed radically for the two statuses.

The qualifications and characters of monks and *dabtarā* are almost diametrically opposed. The monastic state is entered only by means of a sacred rite; the *dabtarā* is in no way ordained, and might even be a "defrocked" priest. The monk's life is normally given to sensual renunciation; the *dabtarā* is normally an acknowledged sensualist (as appears, for example, in the proverb *ḳa-mesā ya-talaya dabtarā / yādargāl serā* ["a *dabtarā* who is kept from lunch / will work intrigues"][40] and in stories which celebrate the *dabtarā*'s use of his knowledge for private erotic ends). In the monk the virtue

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pleasure among the Amhara, but also as a typical response to situations which arouse anxiety. The crisis of death is met first of all by a prolonged ritual of wailing, and this is followed by a series of memorial feasts which occur on fixed days following the person's death. Any kind of bad news evokes repeated exclamations of "Ay! Ay!" When a child or wife is punished, the response is a prolonged and monotonous yell usually out of proportion to the actual pain felt. In the anxious hour before battle, war chants and boastful cries tune up the warriors' spirits. Moments of great awe, finally, such as the appearance of the holy ark when it is brought out of the church or the arrival of some great political personage, occasion a shrill ululation.

Response to illness was the anxiety area chosen as an index of positive fixation by Whiting and Child in their cross-cultural study of *Child Training and Personality*. They assumed that a fixation on oral gratification would express itself in a preference for therapies which involve swallowing something.[13] In this area, too, Amhara culture displays a preoccupation with orality, and not just in the form of swallowing. Something akin to a general principle for oral therapy appears in the well-known Amharic proverb: "For headache, shout on it! For stomach-ache, eat on it!"

A number of the oral therapies practiced by the Amhara are naturally functional, such as drinking a purgative made from leaves of the *kosso* tree to cure tapeworm, or eating a kind of unleavened corn bread to arrest dysentery. Beyond this, most of their magical therapies are also oral. Drinking holy water (and sometimes bathing in it) is believed to cure nearly every sort of affliction, from rheumatism and leprosy to eye and ear ailments. In some regions it is believed that eating the liver of a hyena will cure syphilis. Psychotherapy, too, often relies on oral remedies: the *zār* on a patient is often placated by feeding him, via the patient, a sumptuous meal. Oral types of prophylaxis are also to be noted. Garlic is eaten in order to prevent malaria. Certain kinds of animals are eaten on special occasions in order to ward off sickness. Finally, there is the remarkable phenomenon of the *lālibalā*, a night singer, who can protect himself against hereditary leprosy only by singing out loud in the night air.

In general, one can say that the Amhara have a tendency to attribute magical efficacy to oral incorporation and, to a lesser extent, to the adroit use of language. The latter belief appears in the assumption that human problems are solved by attaining some particularly fortunate verbal formulation, and in the association of outstanding wisdom with unusual mastery of language. The former appears in beliefs and legends which associate eating a lot with the attainment of unusual bravery, longevity, and physical strength. A legend about the invader Ahmad Grāñ, for example, relates that as a baby he was able to consume fourteen bowls of *ĭnjarā* at one sitting. A num-

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ber of Amhara folk tales, moreover, have as their central theme the resolution of conflict or the attainment of mastery over the environment by means of eating something or presenting food to someone.[14] It is a theme conspicuous in the legend which celebrates the ascendance of the first of the Shoan Amhara emperors, Yekuno Amlāk (1270-85). According to *The Book of the Riches of Kings,* Yekuno Amlāk ate by chance the head of a rooster which had been set out for a king of the rival Zāgwē Dynasty:

> And this youth Yakuno Amlak found the head of the cock which the woman had left by the fire-place, and he took it and ate it, and it filled his belly, and it made him an exalted person and so mighty a man that he was superior to every other man of might, and it made his face to shine like the light of the sun, and his majesty filled all the other servants of the king with awe, and all the people feared him, and they marvelled at him, and they loved him exceedingly, and they placed him in their hearts, and they recognized that the grace of God was upon him, and they said, "What is the thing which hath come upon this young man?"[15]

Oral Sadism

In addition to subserving a passive, receptive mode of relating to the environment, preoccupation with the oral zone also figures in Amhara culture as the locus of a variety of aggressive modes of behavior and fantasy. Hostility is expressed by a number of oral gestures. Sticking out the tongue and spitting on the ground in front of somebody, for example, are two forms of non-verbal insult. Biting the lower lip is an indication of anger. Touching the tongue, and then forehead, chin, and cheeks, signifies "You just wait!" When fighting, men sometimes bite one another's ears. The activation of a strong biting impulse in situations of military combat is suggested by the following refrain from an Amhara martial declaration, recorded over a century ago:

> Oh brothers, you are hungry and thirsty! Oh true sons of my mother,
> Are you not birds of prey? Come on! There is the enemy's flesh.
> And I, I will be the rider to butcher for you! Forward,
> And if you lack hydromel, I will give you my blood to drink.[16]

The theme of cannibalism appears in various forms in the Amhara imagination. One of the common subjects of traditional Amhara painting is the story of the cannibal Balaya Sab. His name is in Ge'ez, and means "Eater of Men." The story about him derives from one of the old legends collected in *The Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*[17] Balaya Sab was a wicked man who fed on the flesh of humans. At his death he appeared before St. George, who measured his evil deeds against his good deeds on a large scale. On the side of evil deeds were placed the souls of all those he had eaten, so heavy a weight that the devil began to make ready to carry him off to hell. Then

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cannibal with eyes in the back of his head. (The specter of the *çhirāq* is sometimes evoked in order to frighten children into behaving properly.) Still another figure is the *salābi*, a person who is imagined capable of spiriting away a man's harvested grain by means of magic incantations.

Without delving into questions on the cultural origins and social functions of oral ambivalence among the Amhara, one can understand how it comes into being in the individual by looking at what happens during childhood in Amhara society. It is true that, if one abides by the hypothesis on this subject supported by Whiting and Child's cross-cultural study, the phenomenon remains puzzling. Their theory attributes a high degree of anxiety about oral gratification to a low level of indulgence of oral gratification in early childhood and a high level of frustration during weaning. This particular hypothesis is not consistent with the data on the Amhara. As we noted earlier in this chapter, oral gratification is indulged among infants to a very high degree by Amhara mothers. There is considerable variation in Amhara practice with regard to weaning, moreover. At times the advent of a new baby or a mother's sickness may require abrupt weaning, in which case a bitter substance is put on the mother's nipple to discourage the infant. In many cases, on the other hand, weaning occurs so gently and spontaneously that little or no frustration is involved for the infant. The relative frequency of these two procedures is a question for which adequate data have not been assembled, but the norm seems to be a gradual departure from the breast, after the child has been happily adjusted to eating other food for more than a year.

Even if the Amhara child is not frustrated by too little indulgence of sucking and too severe weaning, he is nonetheless deprived in two other respects as he emerges from infancy. One is nutritional. Medical studies of Abyssinian children suggest a dietary deficiency beginning in the second half of the first year, and persisting throughout early childhood.[21] It is possible that this relative decline in biological well-being contributes to a sense of deprivation toward the end of the breast-feeding period.

The emotional situation of the child after weaning presents a more visible area of frustration. Amhara childhood is marked by a fairly sharp discontinuity. This may be illustrated by the fact that many Amhara boys are nurslings at the age of three and shepherds at five. The narcissism which has flowered during the nursing stage is dealt a series of blows as the young child becomes subject to the responsibilities, punishments, and suppressed status which are the lot of Amhara children. According to contemporary psychoanalytic theory, this sort of change in emotional support has far more significance for the development of behavioral tendencies than the mechanics of the weaning process; and what psychoanalysts have posited as a possible